

Living Word Fellowship Church
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A Biblical Analysis of How God Defines Stewardship

I. A DEFINITION OF STEWARDSHIP

Lesson #1

A. The Meaning of Stewardship:

1. In the Old Testament, a steward is a man who is over a house (Genesis 43:19; 44:4; Isaiah 22:15).
 - a) Joseph was the steward over Potiphar's household (Genesis 39:1-6).
 - b) The same took place with Daniel (Dan. 2:46-49).
2. In the New Testament, there are several words translated as a steward: one to whose care or honor one has been entrusted, a guardian (Mt. 20:8; Gal. 4:2), and a manager, a superintendent.

B. Principles that Explain its Meaning:

1. God made man to have dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26-28), so we are His stewards over the earth.
2. It is usually the Christian's responsibility, delegated to him under "Christ's kingly government of his own house." Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:15-20).
3. All things are Christ's (Proverbs 8:19-21; Acts 17:24-31; Col. 1:16-19; Eph. 1:22-23) and believers are His executors or stewards (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25). This includes spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10).
4. To whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures, and the duty of dealing out the proper portion to every servant and even to the children not yet of age: Luke 12:42; 1 Cor 4:2; Gal 4:2; (from Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2000, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

II. The Biblical Significance and History of Stewardship

A. There are four incidents in man's history that are relatively important for the area of stewardship:

1. The time of Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel:

a) First fruits:

i) "Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offerings; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell." (Genesis 4:4-5; Hebrews 11:4,6).

ii) It means the first (in place, time order, or rank), first (with regard to dignity; e.g., Amos 6:1,6), the first of its kind (e.g., with regard to time), firstfruits (Gen. 49:3; Rev.3:14 where Jesus Christ is the Source of creation); the beginning of a fixed period of time (Gen. 1:1; Deut. 11:12), commencement, origin (Gen. 10:10; Jer. 28:1), former state (Job 42:12), former times (Is. 46:10); the best, the choicest, firstling. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

iii) The primary meaning is "first" or "beginning" of a series. This term may refer to the initiation of a series of historical events (Genesis 10:10; Jeremiah 26:1), but it also refers to a foundational or necessary condition as the reverence or fear of God (Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 1:7) and the initiation, as opposed to the results, of life (Job 8:7; 42:12). It is used frequently in the special sense of the choicest or best of a group or class of things, particularly in reference to items to be set aside for God's service or sacrifice. The "first fruits" (Leviticus 2:12; 23:10; Nehemiah 12:44) and "choicest" (Numbers 18:12) fruits are so distinguished. (from Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. Copyright © 1980 by The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved. Used by permission.)

iv) For the Israelites, who were mostly farmers, the land was the greatest of God's gifts, and its abundant produce was evidence of his providential care for them (see Deut. 8:7-10; 11:9-15). But so bounteous was God's provision that there was always the temptation to become complacent and take it for granted or to become conceited and put it down to their own cleverness, and with their affluence forget God (see Deut. 8:11-20; 11:16-17). This was the mistake made by the rich fool in Jesus' parable (Luke 12:16-21). It is a mistake we can all make. That was why the offering of the first fruits was so important. It was an acknowledgment that all was owed to the goodness and blessing of God. God was the giver of all the good things they and their families enjoyed, and in gratitude, they were giving the first fruits back to God (cf. Deut. 26:1-11). So, in effect, it was a mark of faith and trust in God—not when the barns were

empty and when they were anxiously waiting for the spring rains to fall and ripen the grain, but in days of prosperity, when the harvest had been gathered in, and the barns were stacked full. It put and kept the stacked barns in their proper place.

v) Paul utilizes the metaphor of the first fruit (aparchē) to speak of the relationship between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:20, 23). Christ's resurrection is the "first fruit of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20), and like the first fruits of the harvest, it is a taste and a guarantee of the full harvest of resurrection yet to come. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is called "first fruit" in Romans 8:23 (cf. Holy Spirit as "downpayment" in 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14), a foretaste of the heavenly divinely bestowed life of the age to come. And when Paul speaks of his first converts in a region, he calls them the "first fruits" (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15), in that they are the first fruits of God's eschatological harvest from among the nations.

2. The time of Abraham:

a) Abraham did not give because of the law (God provided the Law to Moses, who came after Abraham) to Melchizedek in Genesis 14:17-24; Abraham gave based on the custom of his day.

b) Abraham's gift to God is because he recognized how good God had been to Him (Genesis 13:2-7, 14-18; 14:23). Abram believed God and blessed God because of his faith in God, not because of the law.

- *"For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."* (Rom 4:16; NASU)

c) 10% of a person's gross income (1 Corinthians 16:2) did not start with the law; it started by faith, and after the law was fulfilled (Christ fulfilled all of it; Matthew 5:17), God did not say, do not follow Abraham. From the verses mentioned above, Abraham's giving, when there was no law, is a model we should follow.

d) These verses listed below teach us that it was always God's intent that Abraham's walk of faith was a model for Jews and Gentiles, whether under the Law or grace (Genesis 12:3).

- *"And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."* (Genesis 12:3; NASU)

- *“For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” (Romans 4:13; NASU)*
- *“For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.” (Romans 4:16-17; NASU)*

e) Note that in Hebrews 7:4-10 the writer is careful not to mention the word ‘tithe’ in this passage because to the readers, it would mean the three tithes that came under the Law: the Levitical tithe (Num. 18:21), the Festival tithe (Deut. 14:22-26), the tithe for the needy (Deut. 14:28, 29). The writer is being careful to mention the church (Heb. 10:23-26), which is functioning under grace, tenth because it directly relates to what Moses (operating by faith, like we are) gave to Melchizedek. Again, the writer was careful to say a tenth (Heb. 7:4). Please note that the writer knows that he is writing to a majority Jewish congregation, so if he said tithe, they would think he is speaking of all three tithes, which add up to 23 and 1/3, not 10%.

- *“Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. 5 And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. 6 But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises.” (Hebrews 7:4-10; NASU)*

3. The time of the Mosaic Law:

- a) When God gave the Law to Moses, he took that which was familiar in their culture to formulate the Law. God's Law was, therefore, different yet it was familiar, making it a bit easier for the Jews to adjust to God's standard.
- b) Tithing was a part of their culture, so God outlined laws of how he wanted them to tithe because they were now getting to know God, and He wanted them like Abel and Abraham, who exercise faith in Him. This was not necessary for Abraham or Abel because they knew God personally.
- c) Tithing was designed to be an active part of worship. Without tithing, there truly was no worship (Ps. 96:7-9).

- A Levitical tithe (Num. 18:21)
- A Festival tithe (Deut. 14:22-26)
- A tithe for the needy (Deut. 14:28,29)
- Offerings which were in addition to the required tithes (Deut. 12:17; Mal. 3:8-12)

This means that they were required to pay 23 1/3 of their gross income annually in tithes.

d) There were **five main ceremonial offerings** in the Book of Leviticus, and each of them main focus was how each worshipper can maintain their relationship with the Lord God. There were as follows:

i) **TRESPASS OFFERING *** (Manifest sin as an act against God's law):** The blood of the trespass offering cleanses the conscience and sends the trespasser back to the one he has wronged for restitution and restoration." This was a sense of sorrow over some wrongdoing – a need for forgiveness.

ii) **SIN OFFERING *** (Manifest sin as a part of man's nature):** Mandatory atonement for specific unintentional sin (priest 4:3, community 4:13, leader 4:22, individual 4:27). Requires confession because these must become personally aware of their sin. It is a sin even if they are not aware, 5:17. But obviously, no sacrifice would be offered until the conviction of sin takes place. For instances of sin where no restitution was possible.

- A sense of guilt for the sinner's sin, seeking a pardon from God.

iii) **PEACE (FELLOWSHIP) OFFERING:** Christ is our peace, Eph 2:14. This offering represents fellowship and communion with God. A sense of distance from God. Seeking to restore their relationship with God. This led to the following:

- Thanksgiving offering (Lev. 7:12-15; 22:29).
- Votive offerings (Lev. 7:16; 27:9-10).
- Free-will offering (Lev. 7:16; 22:18-23).
- Wave offering – sometimes used as a peace offering.

iv) **MEAL (GRAIN) OFFERING:** It was the only bloodless offering, but it was to accompany the burnt offering (Num 28:3-6), sin offering (Num 6:14-15), and fellowship offering (Lev 9:4; Num 6:17). "We must come to Him first with our whole burnt offering. Then we keep coming with our continual meal offering"--Mears, 46. This is the sacrifice of daily devotion.

- This was done as a sense of gratitude seeking acceptance from God.

v) **BURNT OFFERING:** This was the most common sacrifice in the ancient temple. The offering was fully consumed and speaks of complete surrender to the will of God.

e) "Though placed last, the sin and trespass offerings are included in all that goes before. The only reason burnt offerings, meal offerings, or peace offerings can be made is that the blood of pardon has been shed."--Mears, 46. SEE ORDER OF SACRIFICE, NIVSB 150.

- A sense of complete devotion, full surrender to the Lord God (Romans 12:1). The person viewed themselves as owned by God. Same in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:20)

f) HOW DID THIS FUNCTION IN ISRAEL EVERYDAY LIFE:

I) Old Testament: Imagine a worshipper who has stolen one of his neighbor's sheep. He has returned the stolen animal to its owner, but now he feels the need for forgiveness from God.

- First, he comes feeling sorry for a sin he had committed, and by bringing a trespass offering, he received forgiveness. Then he came feeling guilty as a sinner, and by a sin offering, he received pardon. Then he came with a sense of distance from God, and by bringing a peace offering, he went away with a renewed relationship with God. Then his heart was filled with a great desire to express his gratitude to God, and he came with a meal-offering which said "Thank you" to God. Now, finally, as an act of utter devotion to the will of God and craving God's complete ownership, he has brought a burnt offering.

II) NEW TESTAMENT RELEVANCE:

- "When we first come, as awakened and believing sinners, to the Cross, the first thing we see in it is forgiveness of our many trespasses. But we have scarcely begun to rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins before we realize that there is a deeper need, namely, sin in our nature. A deeper insight into the meaning of the Cross meets this further need. Christ not only died for our sins; He bore our sins, as typified in the Sin Offering. It is then when we realize that both sins and sin have been dealt with in the Cross, that we enter into wonderful peace with God, as set forth in the Peace Offering. Then, still further, we find rest and joy and complete acceptance with God in the glorious perfections of Christ as typified in the Meal Offering, while more and more we come into fellowship with God through the fullness of that one perfect Offering to God

on our behalf which is set forth in the Burnt Offering. Is there not wonderful Divine design in all this?"

J. Sidlow Baxter, Explore the Book, I, pages 124-25.

When these worshippers completed this process (this was continuous), they gave 23 1/3 of their crop.

"We can give without worshipping, but we cannot worship without giving."

4. **The time of grace that Christ** established by His death and resurrection seems to imply to some believers that the nature of giving has changed, and we can now give based on our free will.

a) Offerings were required in the Old Testament to show diligence in asking God to forgive sins. However, in the New Testament, we bring offerings to **recognize** the forgiveness of sins.

b) For some reason, people seem to imply that free-will giving is giving as you feel. This is far from the truth. Every example of free-will giving is far more than a tenth because the person is giving out of joy and excitement of what God has done for them, so their gifts were bountiful (2 Corinthians 8:1-2). This is the very reason why when Paul is speaking of free-will giving in 2 Corinthians 8-9, he mentions the word 'bountiful' (2 Corinthians 9:6). Here are some examples:

I. This passage goes from Exodus 35:20-36:7. Here is a sample – "Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses' presence. Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the Lord's contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. Then all whose hearts moved them, both men and women, came and brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so did every man who presented an offering of gold to the Lord." (Ex 35:20-22; NASU) This was done with such liberality Moses had to stop the people; "and they said to Moses, 'The people are bringing much more than enough for the construction work which the Lord commanded us to perform.'" (Exodus 36:5).

II. Similar examples can be found in many passages (Exodus 25:1-9; Proverbs 11:24-25; 28:19-20; Acts 2:44-45; 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 8:1-3).

c) In Corinthian, when the scriptures discuss free will giving, it was for the church in Jerusalem; it was not to keep the church of Corinthian operating but to help with the needs of the church in Jerusalem. This is why it states to give in proportion to what you have (2 Corinthians 8:12; very similar to Exodus 25:21, 29) and therefore correctly assimilates to the meaning of free-will offering executed in the Old and New Testament.

d) A person must first give themselves to the Lord and us, i.e., the church, by the will of God (2 Corinthians 8:5). This is very much the same as 'first-fruits.'

e) As God causes him to prosper so proportionately, he should put aside for the church (1 Corinthians 16:2) from our gross, not our net. This, again, is very much the same as 'first fruits.' Abel gave as God prospered him, the fat of the animal.

f) When believers do not give all which the Holy Spirit directs them to give, they rob God (Malachi 3:8-10). God says as a result, He will ensure they would be unable to enjoy the fruit of their labor consistently because the Lord is not pleased (Haggai 1:1-12; Malachi 1:6-14).